

**The Report of the  
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**Hillcrest High School  
7350 South 900 East  
Midvale, Utah 84047**

**April 20-21, 2004**



Utah State Office of Education  
250 East 500 South  
P.O. Box 144200  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200

**THE REPORT OF THE  
VISITING TEAM REVIEWING**

**Hillcrest High School  
7350 South 900 East  
Midvale, Utah 84047**

**April 20-21, 2004**

**UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION**

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## **FOREWORD**

A major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate inservice growth and school improvement. Consequently, requirements include not only meeting the standards of the Utah State Office of Education, but also completing a school evaluation every six years.

School evaluation is that effort by the local school staff to take a comprehensive look at the school's program, operation, and effect. The school determines how closely its purposes and philosophy coincide with its actual practices and the degree to which its stated objectives are being reached. It is a three-phased program: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, April 20-21, 2004, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to meet the requirements referred to above.

The entire staff of Hillcrest High School is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the Visiting Team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Linda Sandstrom is commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for the generally fine program being provided for Hillcrest High School students, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more adequately meet the needs of the students of Hillcrest High School.

Patrick Ogden  
Interim State Superintendent  
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**HILLCREST HIGH SCHOOL**  
**ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF**

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David Breen ..... Assistant Principal  
Michael Glenn ..... Assistant Principal  
Paula Logan ..... Assistant Principal  
William T. Sherwood ..... (Intern) Assistant Principal

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Jeri Alcorn ..... Counselor  
Karen Brown ..... Counselor  
Eric Murdock ..... Counselor  
Judith Zimmerman ..... School Psychologist  
Tracy Moore ..... ATE Coordinator  
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Kym Woodward  
Judith Zimmerman



## **HILLCREST HIGH SCHOOL**

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

The purpose of the Hillcrest High School educational community is to provide an atmosphere that encourages educational competency, social responsibility, and individual ability.

### **BELIEF STATEMENTS**

We Believe...

- 1 ...that in spite of personal challenges, anyone can make tomorrow a better day.
- 2 ...that educators are responsible to do their best to help students succeed; educators need reinforcement to maintain their passion for teaching.
- 3 ...that the school curriculum should provide experiences to develop self-worth.
- 4 ...that self-discipline and accountability should be a part of the school environment.
- 5 ...that students should demand that they learn at least one new item of information from each teacher each day.
- 6 ...that students should be approached in a non-confrontational way.
- 7 ...that the primary focus should be on the student, not on the program.
- 8 ...that all students/children want to be successful.
- 9 ...that higher order learning skills should be developed, incorporated and encouraged; i.e., imagination, and creativity.
- 10 ...that the school is a support to the family and community and should not be expected to replace their responsibilities.
- 11 ...that all teachers have a responsibility to teach basic educational skills and to hold students responsible for learning and material.
- 12 ...that teachers deserve good pay.

- 13 ...that education is a partnership between parents, learner, teacher and community and all are responsible for the success and pride of the school.
- 14 ...that schools should have the needed current technology available so that students and staff can take advantage of it through resources provided by the district and by community training on site.
- 15 ...that mutual respect is earned and expected.
- 16 ...that students should view school as a privilege, not a right.
- 17 ...that a school's physical environment affects learning.
- 18 ...that people need good self-esteem in order to succeed in education and in life.
- 19 ...that every child has worth.
- 20 ...that we need clear, concise rules and expectations with appropriate, consistent consequences swiftly enforced.
- 21 ...that there should be effective teacher training available.
- 22 ...that traditional education is not for everyone; alternative education opportunities should be available.
- 23 ...that students and staff assume personal responsibility and accountability for work ethic, honesty, etc.
- 24 ...that excellence in all programs generates pride.
- 25 ...that students, staff and community have a responsibility to provide and maintain a safe and clean environment.
- 26 ...that ethics and values are taught by example, and we have a responsibility to set a good example.
- 27 ...that decision-making in the school should involve all parties equally.
- 28 ...that students should accept and be accountable for their performance and behavior. Students should have the opportunity, with help, to reach their potential.

## **MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM**

Douglas Finch, Lone Peak High School, Alpine School District,  
Visiting Team Chairperson

Lisa Tonge, Bonneville Jr. High School, Granite School District

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# **VISITING TEAM REPORT**

## **HILLCREST HIGH SCHOOL**

### **CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE**

Hillcrest High School was built in 1962. At that time Jordan School District only had Jordan and Bingham High Schools. But because of population growth, Salt Lake Valley needed another school; so Jordan's newest school, Hillcrest High School, was built.

Hillcrest High School has only had seven principals since it opened: Principals Jensen, Schick, Lovato, Garrison, Hansen, Steele, and currently Linda Sandstrom.

Hillcrest High School has stood proud for 40 years, and continues to do so as it enters the new millennium. Hillcrest High School will stand for another 40 years and more, representing pride and school spirit for years to come.

*a) What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?*

The student body is drawn from a population that is economically, socially, and ethnically more diverse than most of the high schools in Jordan District. Fifteen percent of the student body is comprised of minority students—up three percent from 2001. Eleven percent of the student body is Hispanic. Furthermore, twenty percent of the student body has fees waived.

ACT composite scores are regularly above the Utah and national averages. The Advanced Placement pass rate has increased nine percent from 2002 to 2003. CRT Language Arts scores have increased each year. AYP passing scores were achieved in all academic cells, with the exception of Special Education Language Arts. The SAT 9 complete battery scores have jumped five percent in 2002 and one percent, to 62, in 2003. All SAT 9 subtest scores are above the fiftieth percentile with the exception of pre-writing.

*b) What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?*

Hillcrest High School made considerable efforts to gather baseline data in areas suggested in the USOE training manual, "Potential Sources of Data/Evidence," yet little of the data is disaggregated by appropriate subgroups; e.g., gender, ethnicity, grade, socio-economic status, etc. The system for managing the data collection in the profile is under development, but not yet fully operational. Members of the Counseling Department demonstrated the most interest and background in gaining capacity to work with student performance data.

Furthermore, analysis of the student performance data collected in the profile is superficial and incomplete. The school is to be commended for its utilization of the Comprehensive Guidance survey data to gather perception data regarding school improvement.

### **Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:**

- The school can cite some of its strengths and limitations, but needs to collect more data in order to fully review the critical dimensions of information required for the profile. These areas could include trends in grading, disaggregated data of performance exams to identify “who is not learning,” etc.
- There is little evidence of integration and synthesis of the data, suggesting that the school improvement goals and action plans were in place long before the data was gathered and analyzed. The Visiting Team recommends that the school now reexamine the direction of the school improvement efforts, guided by data analysis and additional areas of inquiry not yet considered by the Hillcrest High School community.
- The school improvement team and staff are beginning to consider, on a limited basis, the implications of some of the data contained in the school profile for the development of the school improvement plan. Training in utilization of school data by school leadership and school improvement team members could enhance the capacity of Hillcrest High School to utilize data as a stimulus for improvement and strategic selection of improvement goals.

## **CHAPTER 2: THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS**

- a) *To what extent has the school community engaged in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?*

A limited number of members of Hillcrest High School’s staff or leadership team have been involved in ongoing training in the accreditation self-study process. The school’s efforts were somewhat reflective of past practices of preparing for an USOE “audit,” and utilized much of the work from the school’s last strategic planning (1997).

The members of the Husky Pack (School Community Council) were very aware of Hillcrest High School’s efforts to prepare for the site visit, but were unaware of many of the key elements of the self-study process. The Visiting Team spent a considerable amount of time conducting in-service for the school and community members concerning the details and intent of the process.

The report was primarily divided into portions, which were delegated to department chairs or focus group members. Thus, the style and depth of the reflective process in many portions of the report were disjointed, further revealing the school's lack of training in the current USOE model. However, the Visiting Team feels the school's stakeholders made an honest effort, with the understanding they had, to conduct an initial departmental and interdepartmental analysis of the school.

- b) *To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?*

It was unclear from the report, as well as the two-day visit, whether the school has a firm handle on its current strengths and limitations, except for "gut level" reactions to perception data available in the surveys. The identification of strengths and limitations in the self-study is very departmentalized, and based on recognition in festivals and extracurricular achievements. The Visiting Team suggests that a more thorough analysis and identification of strengths and weaknesses could further enhance Hillcrest High School as a professional learning community.

### **CHAPTER 3: INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS**

Hillcrest High School's desired results for student learning are as follows:

1. Students will increase their academic performance.
2. Students will increase their appreciation for diversity, respect others, and recognize the contributions of various segments of the student body.
3. Students will increase their development of individual talents, skills, and behaviors.
4. Students will benefit from increased school communication and interaction with parents, the community, and businesses.

#### **Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals:**

- a) *To what extent did the school facilitate a collaborative process to build a shared vision for the school (mission) that defines a compelling purpose and direction for the school?*

Hillcrest High has an established consensus-building process in the form of a positive action committee, dubbed the “Husky PAC,” that involved the school’s community in defining the school’s beliefs, mission, and goals. However, there is no evidence of the school’s involvement in conducting an internal or external analysis of important information and data to guide the development of the school’s beliefs, mission, and goals.

- b) *To what extent has the school defined a set of beliefs that reflect the commitment of the administration and staff to support student achievement and success?*

The school’s mission statement describes the purpose and direction for the school, and reflects a focus on student learning as the top priority for the school. Hillcrest’s belief statements do address some key issues pertinent to decision making and policy development, yet the statements are numerous and perhaps not fully developed. Few stakeholders at the school could articulate any of the belief statements.

- c) *To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs)?*

Most of the goals of the school reflect the school’s priorities for improving student learning and align with the desired results for student learning. While the goals are challenging, they are not measurable in their current form and could not be attained within a reasonable time line.

### **Curriculum Development:**

- a) *To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and the Utah Core Curriculum (with inclusion of the Utah Life Skills)?*

The Visiting Team found that interdepartmental collaboration has occurred, but could be expanded and more specifically correlated to the Utah Life Skills curriculum and school-wide goals. While the school’s initial collaboration efforts and future potential seem strong, limited teacher time, as well as school tradition and habit, are considerable factors in the lack of complete school-wide collaboration.

Cross-curriculum projects as well as class offerings have been implemented and will continue to be further developed. Specialized areas such as applied technology, elective classes, and, in some cases, core classes such as science and math have struggled to work collaboratively, but most teachers are eager and enthusiastic about setting new goals, creating innovative projects, and enhancing student work samples.

There was some evidence of implementation of the school's goal of including reading and writing into every classroom. Journal keeping and written problem-solving techniques and technology seem to be represented in every classroom, and could be further improved through additional training and in-service.

The Visiting Team recommends that department heads and faculty members frequently correspond with those outside of their subject area, as well as meeting within their own departments on a regular basis, in establishing one or two measurable curriculum goals from which to obtain data.

- b) *To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's desired results for student learning?*

It is apparent that the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and also reflects a wide variety of learning styles; however, it fails to account for varying degrees of difficulty or the need to challenge students in their individualized learning. Teachers are very familiar with state and national standards, yet often implement additional concepts and assignments that do not correlate with school goals and student exploration.

The Visiting Team observed little support for the use of research-based instruction and relevant curriculum modifications. The Visiting Team suggests that periodic reviews of the curriculum should be conducted and evaluated based on student performance data and specific school goals. Classroom curricula are currently modified on an inconsistent basis school-wide. Some irrelevant aspects of the curriculum have been eliminated, but most changes in the curriculum come in the form of additions. It is further recommended that school administrators and counselors continue their efforts to provide specific in-service trainings that relate to integrated curriculum instruction.

The school's curriculum offerings overall are to be commended. The Counseling Department has put forth a tremendous effort in improving curriculum selection in order to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student body population. Cross-curriculum classes such as English 11/American History and a proposed algebra/physics class are strong examples of the school's initial efforts to become collaborative. The Visiting Team also found that many departments are currently cooperating in their development of class disclosures and expectations. Other examples of initial collaboration efforts include computer technology-integrated presentations and the creation of the *Expressions* magazine among art, photography, and poetry class.

There is a strong desire among department heads and new teachers to improve curriculum strategies and emphasis. It appears that students are sometimes unable to identify the class objectives and standards, and special needs students are



occasionally viewed as a burden to the regular education process. Many teachers have recognized these as area in need of improvement. Teachers have also recommended a school-wide effort to articulate objectives and expectations to students on a daily basis, and correlate objectives to the Utah Life Skills curriculum and the overall school mission statement.

### **Quality Instructional Design:**

- a) *To what extent does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students?*

The Visiting Team found evidence that the teachers at Hillcrest High School are implementing a variety of learning experiences to actively engage students. Classroom disruptions are kept to a minimum so that instructional time is protected, which promotes a positive learning climate in the building. Visiting Team members observed a variety of instructional strategies such as group work, projects, demonstrations, direct instruction, experimentation, technology-aided instruction (PowerPoint), writing labs, presentations, and hands-on activities.

The Visiting Team commends the faculty members for their work at Hillcrest to implement reading and writing strategies across the curriculum. The Visiting Team recommends that the faculty continue discussion, collaboration, and in-service in this area, and continue to work toward more fully implementing these strategies, as well as providing lines of evidence of the impact of these efforts across departments.

- b) *To what extent does the professional staff employ a variety of instructional strategies to ensure the needs of different learners are met?*

The Visiting Team observed a variety of instructional strategies being utilized in the classrooms. Random students who were interviewed by each of the Visiting Team members reported that they experience many engaging teaching strategies as they go through the school day. The Visiting Team has observed the faculty members to be dedicated and committed to providing a positive educational experience for their students.

The Visiting Team observed that the needs of different learners are not always being met in all departments, and suggests that the faculty collectively research and expand the use of multiple teaching strategies, including more inclusionary strategies such as using differentiated curricula in order to better serve all students and their range of learning styles.

- c) *To what extent do the professional staff and leadership provide additional opportunities which support student learning?*

The Visiting Team commends the staff on offering additional opportunities to support student learning. Most departments offer make-up classes after school or on Saturdays. Many teachers provide before- or after-school tutoring and homework help. Teachers provide time to review for ACT and AP exams. In-class aides are provided for some of the Spanish-speaking students to assist them with the language barrier.

In speaking with student groups, the Visiting Team found that the students feel that their teachers are flexible in working with them in special instances—for example, in adjusting deadlines when they are heavily involved in other activities such as the school musical.

The Visiting Team recommends that the staff recognize the need for and receive in-service on inclusionary teaching practices, as well as sheltered English strategies to offer more support for students with special needs such as ESL and special education. Some departments have identified this as a goal for improvement, whereas others have shown no evidence of addressing this issue. The Visiting Team notes that this is an area for further inquiry and improvement.

The Visiting Team also recommends that the collection of additional data and analysis would identify which students or groups of students require additional assistance, and help ensure that all students in need receive help on a consistent basis.

### **Quality Assessment Systems:**

- a) *To what extent has the staff developed classroom or school-wide assessments based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?*

Based on multiple classroom observations, conversations with varying stakeholders, and data taken from stakeholder surveys, it has been determined that many Hillcrest High teachers have attempted to implement assessments based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement. However, there was evidence that work may need to be done on fully aligning these expectations with state expectations and performance standards as determined by the State Core Curriculum.

It is recognized that departments may have differing expectations one from another, and that DRSLs of each department are still emerging in regards to measurable, focused goals. It is also recognized, based on findings, that the school's DRSLs are emerging in the sense that they need to be more clear, concise, and measurable goals with clear indicators of success. Therefore, work needs to be done in aligning assessments of classroom DRSLs with the school's DRSLs as they both become fully developed with clear, measurable indicators of success.

Hillcrest is commended for the steps the school is currently taking in this process, at the same time recognizing that the expectations for student achievement and performance standards are not fully developed with regard to state standards and school-wide DRSLs.

- b) *To what extent are assessments of student learning developed using methods that reflect the intended purpose and performance standards?*

There is strong evidence that multiple forms of assessment are being used in the classroom, based on teacher survey data and teacher interviews. Some of the types of assessments observed and mentioned were selected response questions (true/false, multiple-choice), open-ended questions, portfolios, individual and group projects, and oral presentations. There is insufficient data for the Visiting Team to determine the actual frequency with which each type of assessment is being used, and whether or not the selected method of assessment is aligned with the instructional approach used in the classroom. According to student interviews, however, most of the assessment being done in the classroom is selected response.

There was evidence that common assessments were being used by departments as a whole, particularly in Advanced Placement courses and in the area of the Six Traits of Writing. Little evidence showed that specific, measurable, school-wide performance standards, as related to school DRSLs, were being followed by any of the departments. Several teachers suggested that improvement needed to be made in using assessment data to determine the degree of learning in the classroom by each student, and also to guide their instructional practices.

The Visiting Team also found that CRT data was not being analyzed and disaggregated as effectively as it could be to drive decision making in aligning curriculum with state standards and recognizing critical concepts to improve upon. The Visiting Team notes, however, that several teachers do claim to use their class assessment data to determine what needs revision and what is working well in their curriculum and instructional practices.

Hillcrest High is commended for its willingness to use multiple assessments to gauge authentic student understanding and collaborate as a department in the assessment process. The Visiting Team would recommend that Hillcrest High continue in this area, and also use class and state assessment data more effectively in guiding the school's instructional practices and in determining whether or not students are achieving the intended learning outcomes. The Visiting Team would also recommend a continued effort to align assessments with measurable, school-wide performance standards.

- c) *To what extent are assessments designed, developed, and used in a fair and equitable manner?*

Students, faculty members, and parents were overall very positive about the fairness of assessment practices at Hillcrest High. Teachers have shown a willingness to accommodate special needs and ethnically diverse students through modified tests, extended test time, take-home tests, and allowing these students to take tests with peer assistance (interpreters, special ed. teachers, etc.). However, a lack of ESL-trained teachers at Hillcrest appears to be a problem that may limit the effectiveness of assessments administered to ESL students. Teachers' willingness to vary their assessment approaches shows an understanding of how to cater to the ability levels of all students and allow students to express what they know in several ways.

The Visiting Team encourages continued efforts by teachers to integrate alternate forms of assessment, as opposed to using the traditional selected response tests most of the time. Some teachers and students suggested that more student feedback is needed to determine assessment fairness and appropriateness with regard what is being taught in the class. The Visiting Team recommends that Hillcrest High substantiate with data (i.e., documented student feedback and data analysis) the fairness of assessment and equity issues.

### **Leadership for School Improvement:**

- a) *To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning?*

Hillcrest High School has established an academic learning climate in which teaching and learning are supported. The Visiting Team notes that sustained focus on instructional goals is undermined by the generality and wide breadth of the school's instructional goals. Reading and writing across curriculum groups is one example of sustained instructional effort, yet the reliance on nationally normed testing for monitoring progress has given, perhaps, a false sense of improvement.

Many students note that they feel valued and important at Hillcrest High School, and that accomplishments are noted and recognized through programs such as Husky Heroes and Husky Club.

- b) *To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative?*

The Hillcrest High School leadership is increasing its capacity to work effectively with student achievement data. The school profile portion of the self-study contains many charts and tables, but very little reflective analysis of anything but areas of strength. The Visiting Team recommends that Hillcrest High School

disaggregate and analyze student performance data to guide future decisions based on the data and focused on schoolwide goals and action plans.

The Visiting Team commends Hillcrest High School for the inclusion of parents and students in the decision-making process through the Husky PAC. The school-community group notes that the inclusion of student performance data will be an expectation for future decision making.

- c) *To what extent does the school leadership monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness through a comprehensive assessment system and continuous reflection?*

Summaries of the data contained in the profile in its current state do not fully address the major implication of the data for school improvement planning purposes. Hillcrest High School has not explicitly identified subgroups of students who are or are not learning.

The Visiting Team recommends that Hillcrest High School make a considerable investment in a comprehensive assessment system and continuous reflection. The Leadership for School Improvement Focus Group notes, “Often [the] staff does not know what to do with the information received from the testing.” The focus group further recommends in the report that “staff be given specific direction in what to do with test information.”

- d) *To what extent does the school leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources of the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment?*

The Visiting Team notes that Hillcrest High School’s policies and operational procedures are generally consistent with the school’s beliefs and mission, and are designed to maximize opportunities for successful learning. Instructional time is valued and distractions are minimized. Interviews with students and teachers, however, revealed there is a perception among diverse and eccentric students that they are not always taken seriously by the school leadership, and that their concerns are not always given satisfactory resolutions.

- e) *To what extent does the school leadership make decisions related to the allocation and use of resources which align with the school goals, the achievement of the DRSLs, and school improvement efforts?*

The allocation and use of resources are aligned with the school’s goals. However, the Visiting Team notes that the lack of specificity in the school-wide desired results and goals, and an unwillingness to strategically abandon any current practices, may be undermining Hillcrest High School’s ability to realize potential and measurable gains in school improvement.

- f) *To what extent does the school leadership empower the school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning?*

By including school and community groups in the decision-making process, Hillcrest High School is providing opportunities for meaningful involvement by the school's stakeholders. Responsibility for students who struggle at school (with ESL, attendance problems, etc.) is generally perceived as an administrative or home issue by teachers. While working with culturally diverse students is continually noted as a school-wide issue, few school faculty members have been willing to seek additional training or endorsement for working with ESL learners.

### **Community Building:**

- a) *To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?*

The Visiting Team recognizes that Hillcrest High School has created and is sustaining a learning environment for students that nurtures a sense of caring and belonging. This is evidenced by the consistent comments from teachers, parents, and students that Hillcrest is a place where everyone can fit in. Collaborative and interdependent teams are rarely established to achieve goals, with the exception of the Husky PAC, which meets regularly and provides strong evidence of the effectiveness of the work of the school's stakeholders as a learning community. Positive and productive working relationships are established among most of the students, teachers, support staff, and administrators.

- b) *To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?*

Evidence is present that the school recognizes parents and families as partners in the learning process. Many groups, including parents, administrators, and the Counseling Department, are working on ways to increase parent involvement in the education at Hillcrest. The Visiting Team recommends that Hillcrest High pursue these efforts to continue the involvement of parents and the community.

The school builds collaborative networks of support with parents, community members and groups, youth-serving agencies, and business through the Husky PAC, PTSA, PowerSchool, Boys and Girls Clubs, Midvale Police Department, Midvale City, etc.

The Visiting Team notes a strong emphasis on supporting and building collegial relationships across K-16 levels of education. The Counseling Department has discovered that the information it has with regard to post-secondary opportunities is underutilized, and has made it a priority to increase awareness of this based on

the needs assessment. The Advanced Placement, IB, and concurrent enrollment programs also build upon the K-16 relationship.

### **Culture of Continuous Improvement and Learning:**

- a) *To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs focused on the school's goals for improvement?*

The school's organizational system and culture are supportive of school improvement and professional development. Professional development programs for staff members focus on knowledge and skills that the faculty are interested in, based on validated and research-based practices. However, there is a lack of cohesive planning for tying these activities to school goals and for measuring results. It is unclear whether these programs are prioritized in any way or whether they are systematically tied to school goals.

The school's organizational systems and culture are verbally supportive of professional development and school improvement. The school does not use data to determine what the focus should be or what direction improvement should take.

A wide variety of activities are available. Staff members are highly knowledgeable and mostly willing to grow. Professional development programs usually include high-interest topics that attract as many participants as possible. Projects like faculty training in reading and content area literacy are related to school goals, even though the connection may not be completely data-driven. Some data was collected, but an analysis of the data is missing.

There is a perception that students struggle in language arts, and while there is always room for improvement in reading and writing, school testing data shows a more glaring problem in math instruction, which has not yet been addressed in any formal staff development plans. Similarly, another staff development project, the book club, is a fun and novel approach to staff development with strong participation for a volunteer program. However, it is unclear whether the process used for selecting topics and texts ensures a direct relationship to school goals. Second, the process for follow-up support and sustainability is not evident for the book club, the content literacy initiative, or any other staff development activity.

It was interesting to note that, while the school's ethnic demographic has changed in recent years to include more ESL students, few if any staff members have participated in ESL training. At the same time, it appears that the faculty may not have been fully oriented as to what ESL training entails. In addition, incentives for participation need to be readdressed. If there is a need for the program, and no one is participating, then an investigation of what the limiting conditions may be seems to be in order.

- b) *To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?*

The school showed a willingness to commit resources to change and improvement. However, the school has fostered an incomplete understanding of the change process among its stakeholders. The Community Council, or Husky PAC, is highly committed to continuous improvement and renewal, but the level of training for the staff in the change process expected during accreditation seems spotty.

Growth plans for almost all departments were singularly dependent on factors outside their control. For example, the Math Department focused on purchasing calculators and a new text. They seemed more interested adding staff members with ESL skills than in seeking ESL training for themselves. They are concerned about the placement of students in their lower-level math courses, but fail to mention what they will do to prepare to meet the learning needs of the students who are mandated to take these courses who have a history of math failure.

In terms of professional development, appropriate resources seem to have been made available, but they were not completely utilized. Staff members feel strong support from the administration to participate in a wide variety of activities. They state, "There are lots of things available." At the same time, barriers include the belief that "we have so many assignments there isn't time" for staff development, and also that "some faculty do not take advantage" of opportunities that are available. The school appears to have resources and capacity for professional development that go unused. There may be times when the workshops are not filled, and when budgets that could be available are not completely expended.

#### **CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) STANDARDS I-XI**

##### **Standard I – Educational Program**

This standard is met. Hillcrest High School offers a comprehensive course of study, with core and elective course offerings that meet requirements for high school graduation and provide a variety of opportunities for students.

##### **Standard II – Student Personnel Services**

This standard is met.



**Standard III – School Plant and Equipment**

This standard is met.

**Standard IV – Library Media Program**

This standard is met.

**Standard V – Records**

This standard is met.

**Standard VI – School Improvement (This is addressed in the self-study.)**

This standard is met.

**Standard VII – Preparation of Personnel**

This standard is met.

**Standard VIII – Administration**

This standard is met.

**Standard IX – Teacher Load**

This standard is not met. At the time of the annual report, October 15, 2003, Hillcrest High had 10 teachers with excessive class loads.

**Standard X – Activities**

This standard is met.

**Standard XI – Business Practices**

This standard is met.

**CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS – ACTION PLAN**

- a) *To what extent is the school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up?*

The Visiting Team noted that the selection of the school action plans was done prior to and independent of the collection of student performance data, survey information, and departmental and focus group analysis. Due to the lack of alignment, the Visiting Team is not certain that the plan addresses the critical needs of the school.

- b) *To what extent is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, school-wide and system-wide?*

Most of the activities to prepare for this site visit seemed to be focused on the preparation of documents to be reviewed; this is a necessary component, but the data collection, introspection, and forward planning are missing. There is little evidence that a process of self-study will continue beyond the site visit, yet there is a high level of school and community interest in working toward school improvement. However, several individuals have put extensive work into the process, and the burden does not seem to be shared equally. Staff members were not fully trained in, nor have they fully adopted, the continuous improvement process. Participation has not been equal or consistent across departments, and there has been more of a focus on checking off standards than on introspection and meaningful action planning. This Visiting Team feels this “hoop jumping” has undermined a high level of commitment to focused, school-wide action plans.

- c) *How sound does the follow-up process that the school intends to use for monitoring the accomplishments of the schoolwide action plan appear to be?*

Hillcrest High has established timelines and responsibilities for accomplishing the action plans, but has not articulated plans to monitor the accomplishments of the school-wide plans. The follow-up process is generally missing from many of the school’s goals and action plans due to the design of school progress. The action plans’ steps may be checked off, but the measure of improvement will only reflect teacher behaviors and implementation, not student performance and improvement.

## **CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM**

### **Commendations:**

- The Hillcrest High School community is overtly concerned about quality interpersonal relations with the majority of students. The Visiting Team felt very welcome and was treated with first-class “Husky Hospitality.”
- Hillcrest High School has an established culture of high expectations that has proven successful for many years and has momentum for years to come. The

community celebrates the accomplishments of its youth in the halls of this school. While enrollment has declined in recent years, effort and expertise in managing the fluctuating enrollment have preserved programs, and even expanded in offerings such as the International Baccalaureate program.

- The Visiting Team commends Hillcrest High School for recognizing community members, parents, and families as partners in the learning process. Many groups, including parents, administrators, and the Counseling Department are working on ways to strengthen commitment and utilize resources available within the Hillcrest High School learning community.

**Recommendations:**

- The Visiting Team suggests that Hillcrest High School continue to implement and explore inclusionary teaching strategies and design academic and non-academic activities based on caring acceptance of ethnically diverse or eccentric students. Part of this line of inquiry would include an intensive self-study to specifically identify which students are learning and succeeding in school and which are not.
- The Visiting Team recommends Hillcrest High School receive training in and utilize the accreditation self-study process to establish measurable and clearly articulated school-wide desired results for student learning and improvement goals. The Visiting Team recommends that the school reexamine the direction of the school improvement efforts, be strategic in allocating limited resources, and utilize student performance data to monitor the effectiveness of current and future action plans.